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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was (1) to survey the use of parent-teacher conferences in selected elementary schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, and (2) to develop techniques for the teacher to follow so that the conferences will be successful. A telephone call was made to the principals requesting assistance in arranging personal interviews with teachers, parents, students, and the principal of each school. Teachers and students were selected for the interview according to availability. Parents were chosen by random sampling. Using a list provided by the school, every third parent was interviewed. The interviews were conducted on a 1 to 1 basis. Ways of improving the parent conference were through in-service training sessions for everyone involved. The elementary school principal has a major role in helping teachers to make parent-teacher conferences successful. The principal and the classroom teacher have to make a cooperative effort if parent-teacher conferences are to accomplish anything. (FF)

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE NEEDS FOR THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE PROGRAM AT PORCUPINE SCHOOL ON THE PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION

A Project Paper Presented to

Mr. Wynne W. Ester of the Graduate Faculty

Northern State College

Aberdeen, South Dakota

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

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by

Anthony Whirlwind Horse

August 1970

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Parent-teacher conferences are one of the widely used methods for improving parent-teacher understanding. The objective of the parent-teacher conferences is improved learning opportunities for the pupil. If the parent-teacher conference is to achieve this objective, it is imperative that teachers have an understanding for conducting a conference, and have a sincere desire to make this program function properly for the benefit of the pupil.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It is the purpose of this study (1) to survey the use of parent-teacher conferences in selected elementary schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, and (2) to develop techniques for the teacher to follow so that the conferences will be successful.

Need for the study. This study is to reveal the need for procedures that will result in better relationships between the teacher and the parent, and thereby contribute to a better environment for the education of American Indian children.

II. METHODS OR PROCEDURE USED

A telephone call was made to the principal requesting assistance in arranging personal interviews with teachers, parents, students, and the principal of each school. Teachers were selected for the interview according to their availability. Students were also selected on the same basis. Parents were chosen by random sampling for interview. From the list of parents provided by the school, every third parent was interviewed.

A specific set of questions were used to interview each group. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. These results were analyzed and used in the solution of this program.

III. DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Selected elementary schools. This term applies to three schools, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, located at Kyle, Manderson, and Porcupine, South Dakota. A total of six schools on the reservation have the parent-teacher conference and the above schools were chosen because of proximity.

Anecdotal record. The term means a "word snapshot" of an isolated incident of behavior which suggests some special significance.

Deep-seated problems. This term refers to emotional situations of such a nature as to warrant special attention.

Referral. A method of using agencies in the school and those outside of the school for helping in the conference program.

IV. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Parent-teacher conferences are increasing as a means of reporting student progress and are fast becoming a general trend on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The factors of cost and limited time involved in this study imposed a delimitation. For this reason it was limited to the selected elementary schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in the State of South Dakota.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Working with parents requires skill and understanding on the part of the teacher, and this is especially true of the teacher's initial contact with parents. The teacher should be alert to several techniques at his command to aid in meeting parents, and to inform them of what is going on in the classroom and what he is trying to accomplish. This is a brief summary of the literature on the parent-teacher conference system.

I. LITERATURE ON THE USE OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Interest in parent-teacher relationships and the realization of the vital part they play in a child's school life have been a matter of gradual development, for the most part, since the middle of the 1800's. It was then that kindergartens began to be established. From the beginning, these new schools stressed the importance of the classroom teacher's knowing the child's home and parents, particularly the mother. Teachers' visits in the homes and Mother's Clubs were commonly accepted as integral parts of any well-established kindergarten. These developments, however, had

little appreciable effect on procedures in elementary schools. Generally speaking, most people assumed that the school knew its business and should be left alone to attend to it.[1]

The home and the school have joint responsibility for a child's development. What happens to him in either place affects his total behavior. In order to help him develop a well-balanced personality structure, the home and the school must cooperate in working out a suitable program of activities and experiences. Individual parent-teacher conferences are one of the most satisfactory means of making this cooperative planning possible.[2]

The best form of reporting pupil progress is the holding of frequent conferences between parent and teacher. Many schools are using this method on the preschool and primary grade levels. The conferences recognize the school's frequent need of the guidance that only parents of pupils can provide. Teachers need an opportunity to present a direct report to the home and a reciprocal report from the home aids the teacher to more fully understand the child. The parents get to know more about their children's growth,

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[1]Irving W. Stout and Grace Langdon, Parent Teacher Relationships (Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1938), p. 1.

[2]Katherin Edith D'Evelyn, Individual Parent Teacher Conferences (New York: Bureau of Publications, 1959), p. 5.

emotional stability, attitudes toward school work and fellow students, and an indication of achievement in academic areas.[3]

Effectiveness of the parent-teacher conference can be enhanced through observing some rather simple regulations. First, parents must be prepared. Unless parents understand and are in sympathy with the conference plan, it cannot succeed. A check-list sent to the parent early in the fall or the year will generally stimulate parental interest in a conference. It is convenient for each teacher to have a conference form to serve as a guide for the discussion. Conferences should be based on anecdotal records, cummulative records, and samples of the pupil's work. After the conference is finished the parent should be given some form of written report. It can be of outline form, indicating the pupil's progress or a summary of mutual plans for the future.[4]

The conference provides a means for utilizing two- and three-way communication. It provides a way of evaluating child growth without threat to the individual and permits truly individualized reporting. The verbal communication is centered upon one child, and eliminates, therefore, the

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[3]Roy DeVerl Willey, Guidance in Elementary Education (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 387.

[4]Ibid., p. 430.

element of comparison, which the written report presents, even when geared to the child's own ability.[5]

Parents can participate in planning and asking questions about any point that puzzles them. Teachers gain from conferences by getting more information about the child and his interests. A conference can touch on more kinds of pupil progress and can do a better job of evaluating the child in terms which mean the same to both parent and teacher than a written report. They must be carefully planned and school patrons must be convinced of their worth if they are to be valuable.[6]

Parent-teacher conferences may be "get acquainted" meetings or they may be held to exchange information between teachers and parents. In the latter type, the purpose of the conference may be used in place of the written report, or it may be a time when a teacher and parent wish to discuss a problem that has arisen.[7]

What to report? Gaither McConnell, of Tulane University, sent out 1,400 questionnaires asking parents what they

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[5]Ruth Martinson and Harry Smallenburg, Guidance in Elementary Schools (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), p. 248.

[6]S. Detter, "Reporting Progress to Parents," School Activities, 30:83, November, 1958.

[7]John A. Barr, The Elementary Teacher and Guidance, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), p. 211.

wanted to know. The three most frequent questions asked, according to McConnell were:

> Does he behave and pay attention in the classroom? How is he making out in his schoolwork? Does he get along with other children and do they like him?

Items they listed fell into these main categories:[8]

Personal and classroom behavior	27%
Academic progress	26%
Social behavior	22%
Home-school relationships	13%
Individual aptitude and ability	9%
Health and physical condition	3%

Louise Weller lists five points in complete agreement between teacher and parent: (1) They do not want the children to fail, (2) Children should not be pushed faster than is good for them, (3) Children should not be caught between the pressures of differing standards at home and school, (4) They do not believe that learning goes on only at school or only at home, (5) They do not believe that all that is worthwhile for children to learn is included in the school curriculum.[9]

II. PITFALLS OF THE PARENT CONFERENCE

Pupil behavior. Stormy behavior patterns are present in nearly every group of children; unless the teacher is

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[8]Gaither McConnell, "What do Parents Want to Know?" Elementary School Journal, 58:84, November, 1957.

[9]Louise Weller, "Helping Teachers Work With Individual Parents," The National Elementary Principal, 37:204, September, 1957.

armed with an adequate background of information, it can color his evaluation of the child's progress. This discord in reporting can darken the parents' appraisal of the conference. He will become confused and hostile. He may think of the school as a jury passing judgment upon his child's behavior instead of trying to change the pattern to a more acceptable type of behavior.

Pupil attitude. Pupil attitude must be reported with considered judgment. The teacher must keep in mind and give equal importance to all parties, the child, the parent and the educational emphasis of the school. This is very difficult for the teacher to do. He must make use of all facets of human relations in order to favorably impress the parent that the real issue concerns the welfare of the child.

Pupil achievement. This is very difficult for both the parent and teacher, because this is reported in terms of the child's mental maturity. Because of the varying rate of mental growth among children, the trend today is to evaluate the progress of each child according to his own ability. This concept is widely accepted among educators but not so much among parents. The teacher should approach this area with caution and tact, because it is difficult for any parent to discuss his child's ability objectively.[10]

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[10]J. A. Bennett, "Pitfalls of Parent Conferences," School Executive, 78:67, April, 1959.

The parent conference has proved to be a valuable technique in reporting pupil progress. However, J. A. Bennett states:

> The pitfalls may prove to be deterrents in public relations. If teachers are made aware of these disturbing factors and are prepared to meet the challenge, the parent-teacher conference should enjoy a permanent position in education.[11]

Disadvantages of the conference. The conference has disadvantages which should not be overlooked. For example, most of the conferences will be held with the mother because the father is usually at work. Occasionally, father and mother have full time employment; thus, the teacher is required to return to the school during evening hours for conferences. Some parents are uncooperative and refuse to visit the teacher. Of course, the traditional report card would be valueless to such parents also. It cannot be denied that the conference method is time-consuming for both teacher and parent.[12]

III. PLACE OF THE CONFERENCE

As nearly as possible, the conference should include a relaxed atmosphere, with comfortable chairs, pleasant surroundings, and freedom from interruptions. It is more

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[11] Ibid., p. 67.

[12] Willey, loc. cit.

practical for the teacher to use the classroom rather than a seperate conference room. The classroom does provide certain advantages. The parent is able to see the setting in which his child works and observe work that other children have done. The teacher can show the parent teaching materials that could not be brought into the conference room. Barr states, "If the conference is likely to involve deep-seated problems with undue emotional tone, it is usually more satisfactory to use a conference room." The conference held in the home, though frequent, sometimes becomes a necessity because of working parents, the inability of parents to leave small children, or other reasons. For many reasons the home conference is not as satisfactory as one held in the school. If problems are involved, the home charged with emotion does not provide the same atmosphere for objective thinking that the school does. The home visit should be for "get acquainted" purposes primarily.[13]

IV. SCHEDULING THE CONFERENCE

Scheduling the conference varies in communities. This can be accomplished by sending a mimeographed letter to parents, or if individual conferences are desired, arrangements can be made by telephone. The ideal time for a

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[13]Barr, op. cit., p. 212.

conference would be during the school day. Special time is set aside, substitute teachers are provided, or arrangements are made for parents to take care of the classroom, or school dismissal, are means for meeting conferences, depending on the community. Two negative aspects of conferences held during the day are that members of the family who work are excluded and baby-sitters are hard to find during school hours. Conferences held after school are most common but time is a limiting factor. The teacher has just finished a teaching day, the parent has to get home to the family, and there are many disturbances. The individual conferences should be of twenty to thirty minutes duration with two hours the maximum amount of time for any group or day of conferences, because the teacher's responses will become stereotyped. The conferences should be extended over a period of several weeks. Some conferences may have to be scheduled for the home. Conferences that involve emotional or academic problems cannot be terminated after one visit but should be allotted additional time. For the teacher who is new and lacks confidence it would be well for that teacher to schedule his conference with parents of children who are progressing satisfactorily in their school work. Such experiences are likely to go smoothly and give the teacher the experience and confidence needed for more difficult meetings.[14]

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[14]Leslie W. Kindred, How to Tell the School Story (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 299.

Teachers who are timid about holding conferences with parents are encouraged to remember that the parent may be a bit timid, too. They will both find inspiration in the fact that they have so much in common.[15]

V. PREVIEW TO THE INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCE

If conferences are held with groups of parents, prior to the scheduling of individual conferences, general school policies concerning curriculum, marking, testing, and the purposes of individual conferences can be explained. Children may be included in the conference. Their role is established ahead of time by some role playing in the class previous to the conference. Where children are involved in the pre-planning, a link is set up between the teacher and the parent which seems to establish a better relationship.[16]

VI. PREPARATION FOR THE CONFERENCE

The teacher must be prepared in order to have a successful conference. One of the ways is to have sufficient information available about the school, the child's family, referral agencies and information about the child. This will be quality of performance, health, ability level, special strengths and weaknesses, his work, relations with

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[15]Detter, loc. cit.

[16]Carol Le Fevre, "Face to Face in the Parent-Teacher Conference," Elementary School Journal, 68:6, Mary, 1968.

peers and his interests. The teacher should be able to explain school procedures and curriculum. Where parents have problems not within the scope of the school, the teacher should know about special services to which referral can be made. Many of these referrals would be made through the principal, but a knowledge of the referral agencies would help the teacher bring the problem to the principal's attention.[17]

The teacher's appearance and attitude are very important. He should be well-groomed and well-poised. The classroom should be as it is during the regular class but with more displays. Parents are interested in looking at things connected with their child's learning process, especially, since many of the processes and learning aids are very different from those used in their days. The teacher must give the parent some idea of the purpose and the nature of the conference. Also, an explanation of the individual conference could be explained in a P. T. A. meeting.[18]

VII. BASIC APPROACH

The conference should be arranged on a friendly basis with a pleasant note from the teacher expressing interest in

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[17]Anne C. Lewis, Conference Time (Washington, D. C.: National School Public Relations Association, 1970), p. 23.

[18]John L. Grindle, "Hints for More Effective Parent-Teacher Conferences," Instructor, 71:25, November, 1961.

the child and anticipated pleasure in chatting with the parents. The purpose is to afford the parent an opportunity to share in the solution of problems involving the child. The parents may become hostile and defensive if the teacher fails to observe this principle. Every effort should be made to insure that the initial contacts with the parents take place under the most favorable conditions possible. To quote Grinnell, "The value of not postponing home contacts until 'a problem' has presented itself, is that it helps to remove the parents' fear that a requested conference means their child is 'in trouble' again.[19]

VIII. USE OF PUPIL DATA

The conferences provide an opportunity to assist parents in knowing their child better by objectively discussing pertinent data about the child. Information should be given in a simple, understandable way, so that it can be interpreted easily. One advantage of holding the conference in the school, when the child's progress is the topic of discussion, is the availability of records. The amount of detailed information which can be given to the parents depends upon their social and educational background and upon whether the child is present. Parents should be encouraged

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[19]J. E. Grinnell and R. J. Young, The School and the Community (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955).

to talk about their child and their problems in guiding his development. The teacher should let parents speak of their problems, listening with sympathy and understanding. The teacher needs to be a good listener.[20]

During the first conference the conversation should be directed toward the child's interests and home experiences. Only after a mutual understanding has been established should the child's problems be discussed. In conversation with the parents at home or at school, teachers should avoid lecturing and arguing. An effort should be made to understand and appreciate the parents' point of view. They should suggest various courses of action and let the solution grow out of the discussion, thus making a shared parent-teacher decision, rather than one made only by the teacher.[21]

IX. CONDUCTING CONFERENCES

To make conferences with parents most effective, the teacher must have all available knowledge about the emotional, social, moral, and intellectual climates in which the child lives. The child's reactions to parents, teachers, other children and to his own physical characteristics and appearances, mental ability, specialized abilities, school

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[20]Grindle, loc. cit.

[21]Odessa C. Ama, "Starting a Conference Program," National Education Association Journal, 49:23, December, 1959.

achievements, and his personality and behavior characteristics are all important factors in his development of which the teacher should have adequate knowledge. In preparation for the conference, the teacher should review all pertinent data available concerning the child.[22]

X. ADVANTAGES OF CONFERENCES

Advantages for reports on the child are that the teacher attains a better understanding of the pupil's background and of the parents' reactions to their children and to the school, while parents can obtain a better idea of what the teacher is trying to accomplish. It provides a basis for friendliness between teacher and parent in the work of the children. With increasing tendency to supplement or replace old-fashioned report cards with individual parent-teacher conferences, teachers need to learn how to conduct a conference which will lead to better understanding and guidance of the child on the part of both parent and teacher.[23]

XI. SUMMARY

Parents are interested in their children's learning experiences. They look at the teacher as one who is

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[22]Grinnell, op. cit., p. 334.

[23]Harold F. Johnson and Lester R. Herman, "Conference Techniques," Clearing House, 40:241, December, 1965.

competently prepared to assist in the child's education. The parent-teacher conference, properly handled, is an excellent educational and public relations tool. The faculty and administration should determine as a group what materials should be presented and discussed at conferences. Principles and techniques suggested in this chapter should make the teacher more effective in conference work. Each teacher should vary the techniques to suit his own individuality. To help the child to develop his life to an optimum is the teacher's first goal and one of the most important avenues to reach this end is through a well-organized parent-teacher conference program.

CHAPTER III

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES: KYLE, MANDERSON, AND PORCUPINE SCHOOLS, PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION

Today it becomes necessary for a school system to implement a well-planned and coordinated program of parent-teacher conferences. The school has part of the responsibility of molding the child into a worthy citizen and with this in mind, the teacher needs every type of assistance to reach that goal. The parents can help give a better picture of the child so the teacher can more fully understand each pupil in his class. With this understanding of the whole child, gained through the conferences, the teacher can guide the child to his highest level of attainment. Thus, education becomes a partnership for the parent, teacher, and student. As a matter of fact, the whole school system benefits from effective conferences. The public relations value alone pays rich dividends. It is amazing how many favorable things parents say about a teacher, a principal, or a school they have come to understand and like.

The three schools that were used in this study were chosen because of the time limit, cost of travel, and their availability in relation to distance. Three other schools

on the reservation held conferences but were not included for the above reasons.

Personal interviews were held with the principals, available teachers, parents, and students. The number of interviews were limited due to summer-time mobility and the time factor. Separate sets of questions were used for each group interviewed. Eight parental interviews were conducted via the telephone.

Manderson School, with an enrollment of 215 pupils, has the conferences scheduled for the first Wednesday following each nine-week period for a total of three conferences per school year. The children are dismissed after lunch and the parents come to the school for the conference. The parents do not have a definite time allotted for their session. The conferences are conducted on a "first come, first served" basis. The teachers remain in their classrooms and the parents go in when ready, since it is informal. If additional conference time is needed, it is scheduled at the first convenience. For the parents that do not come for a conference, a home visitation is made by the teacher after arrangements have been completed by the principal.

Kyle School, with an enrollment of 310 students, used the same plan, initially, but modified the conference time schedule to meet requests made by parents and teachers. A conference is held at the end of the first nine-week period,

one after the first semester, and the third during the second week in April. These are held on Wednesday and Thursday after lunch. The pupil is included in the conference if there is a problem.

Procupine School, with an enrollment of 210 students, has two scheduled conferences, in addition to those that occur when a parent happens to be available. The first conference is held during the first week of November, and the second during the first week in April, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, the entire day. The children are included in the conferences.

Substitute teachers, teacher aides, and parents are used to relieve a teacher for conferences. In some cases, a teacher aide will assist the teacher when the services of an interpreter are necessary. This technique is used by the three schools.

Follow-up and evaluation is applied only for those conferences where a problem exists.

There is much to be desired in this conference program and with this information improvements should be forthcoming.

I. INTERVIEWS WITH PRINCIPALS

During the interview with the principals, the following questions were used:

1. Do you provide any in-service training for preparation of teachers and parents?
2. What is your biggest problem with the parent-teacher conference?
3. What improvements or suggestions do you have that would make the program more effective?
4. Do you think you will replace the report card with the conference?

Each principal had a small amount of training but it was of a shallow nature and a definite step-by-step in-service training program should be implemented.

The biggest problems were scheduling and getting all parents to participate.

The suggestions for improvement are, training, getting the parents totally involved, follow-up, and evaluation.

The report card should be in continued use and should not be replaced in the immediate future, since the conference is in the beginning stage of growth.[24]

II. INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

A total of twenty teachers from the selected schools were interviewed to obtain their reactions to the parent-teacher conference. This was approximately two-thirds of all the teachers, others were on vacation or in summer

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[24]Personal Interviews With the Principals of the Selected Schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of South Dakota, July, 1970.

school. The following list of questions was used during the interview with the teachers:

1. What preparations are made for the conference?
2. Are the conferences time-consuming?
3. How do they serve you as a teacher?
4. What are the greatest problems with the conferences?
5. What inprovements or suggestions do you have concerning the conference?
6. What is done if a parent does not come?
7. What is your preference, report cards or the conference, or both?

The preparations made were meager. To quote one teacher, "We play it by ear." All information about the child is kept within reach. Invitations are sent to the parents.

The conferences are time-consuming and need improvement. They are time-consuming because there was too little advance preparation.

We get to know more about students, their parents, and home life. We become more aware of the students as individuals and tend to keep a more meaningful observation of them. Conferences have helped classroom behavior, changed attitudes, and helped individual improvement in school work.

The greatest problems are scheduling, getting parents to come, and trying to fit the pieces together for a more meaningful conference.

Suggestions for improving the conference were in-service training, scheduling, complete parent participation, and evaluation.

For parents that do not come, a home visit is arranged by the teacher, through the pupil and principal.

All the teachers preferred the combination of report card and conference.[25]

III. INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

Forty-five parents were interviewd, eight of these by telephone. Fifteen were selected at each location from a list provided by the principal. Every third parent listed was chosen and if they were not at home the next one on the list was contacted for an interview.

The following list of questions was used during the interview with the parents:

1. What is your opinion of the conference method?
2. Do you have enough time at the conference?
3. What do you think is the greatest problem in the conference program?
4. Are you learning enough about your child?
5. Do you have any suggestions for improving the conferences?

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[25]Personal Interviews With Twenty Teachers of the Selected Schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of South Dakota, July, 1970.

6. What do you think of the idea of replacing the report card with the conference as the reporting device for pupil progress?

Every parent interviewed expressed satisfaction with the conference method and wanted to continue and improve it.

Parents indicated there was sufficient time and knew that if more time was needed it could be arranged.

The greatest problems that parents had was lack of knowledge for active participation in the conference, trying to keep the appointment, and getting a baby-sitter.

The parents learned things about their children that they had previously thought unimportant or had taken for granted. Information is received from the teacher first-hand and there is no misunderstanding. Parents thought they could detect definite changes in their children's attitude toward the school.

Parents suggested the need for in-service training for all participants.

The parents did not want the report card replaced, but approved supplementing it with the parent-teacher conference.[26]

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[26]Personal Interviews and Telephone Calls to Forty-Five Parents of the Selected Schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of South Dakota, July 1970.

IV. INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

Two schools did not involve the students in the conference. The children that were involved in the conferences were interviewed for their reactions. Fifty children were asked to give their opinions of the conferences. These children ranged in age from six to fourteen years. The following questions were directed to the children.

1. What do you think of the parent-teacher conference?
2. In what ways has the conference helped you?
3. Do you think we should have them again?

For the younger children the questions had to be rephrased for better understanding. The quotes listed below will give an answer to the above questions.

"It was okay"
"I liked my folks coming to visit"
"It was fun"
"My mom didn't know I was a good boy"
"I thought I was going to get a scolding but didn't"
"Teacher told my mom and dad how to help me"
"My mom was proud of me"
"Grandmother said she liked my teacher"
"I wonder why they have those??"
"We should do that again"
"Yeah man, ah yes sir!"

The children are looking forward to the next school year because of the added interest on the part of the parent.[27]

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[27]Previews With Fifty Students of one of the Selected Schools on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation of South Dakota, July 1970.

Where the child is included in the conference there is no second-hand information which could cause misunderstanding. The student is the focal point of the conference and should rightly be, since that is the basic reason for the conference. Because the student is present at the conference the teacher has less difficulty in discussing the attitudinal or behavioral problems. Parental support of the school is strengthened and children pressure the parents to attend the conferences.

V. HINTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE

If the classroom teacher should feel a little timid about holding conferences with parents, remember that the parent may be a bit timid, too. Both may feel more comfortable when they realize how much they have in common. Both want children:

1. to succeed
2. to progress at the best rate for them
3. to feel that the standards at home and at school complement each other
4. to know that learning takes place at home as well as at school
5. to know that the school curriculum is the beginning that leads to much more that is worthwhile for children to learn.

Teachers can prepare themselves for the conference with this list of questions that parents might ask. These are only a few and teachers can add to them.

1. What will my child study?
2. How does cutting out paper help my child?

3. How do you teach reading?
4. Why do you teach printing instead of writing?
5. Why do you teach in groups?
6. What do you do for the child who learns faster or slower than the rest?
7. What good are field trips?
8. What about discipline?
9. What about the grading system?
10. How can I help my child to learn?

Following is a list of questions that teachers can hope to learn about the child from the parents.

1. What does the child think of school?
2. How is the child's health?
3. How is his emotional adjustment?
4. How does he spend his time out of school?
5. What is his response to rules and regulations at home?
6. What hobbies or special interests does the child have?
7. What discipline works best with the child at home?
8. Does he have any home responsibilities?
9. Does he have a suitable place to read or write?

After the teacher has prepared for the individual conference, the next step is to set up for the group conference. This should be done as soon as possible after school begins. Plan an evening meeting, on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, for an hour, then refreshments, all in the classroom. Send personal invitations to the parents with a RSVP. At this time, parents ask questions and should be given a prepared list to aid them in asking questions at the individual conferences.

The sequence of events should be:. (1) preparations for the conference, (2) beginning the conference, (3) the question period, (4) the visiting period, and (5) the follow-up.

The following checklist will benefit the teacher for good individual conferences.[28]

1. Make careful preparations.
2. Ensure privacy.
3. Provide an informal setting.
4. Set a time limit.
5. Establish rapport.
6. Begin on a positive note.
7. Encourage parents to talk.
8. Listen attentively.
9. Develop an attitude of mutual cooperation.
10. Delay making numerous definite suggestions.
11. Encourage suggestions from parents.
12. Use parents practical suggestions as a springboard for action.
13. Summarize points covered.
14. Make plans together for future progress.
15. End on a note of continuing cooperation.
16. Make notes after parents leave.
17. Be informed about school purposes, methods, and achievement.

Evaluation and follow-up are very important. Keep information in a written record. Send the parents an unexpected note explaining how you plan to help. If feasible, ask parents to help the class in some way which may strengthen the bonds between you. Send a year-end letter to the parent, summarizing conferences and the progress and weaknesses of the child. This stimulates school-parent relations and may help the child's next teacher. Keep a carbon copy in the cumulative folder.

Try having a conference with the child the following day. Let him know generally what was discussed. Outline

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[28]Information Taken From Proposed Conference Plan to be Incorporated into the Regular Program for Porcupine School, Porcupine, South Dakota, 1970.

his strong points and his weak points. This will eliminate much of the mystery of conferences for him and let him know that both you and his parents are working for him.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Every effort must be put forth by the school and the teachers to supply the parent with the information that will help them to more fully understand their children in relation to the school and to the modern trends of their society. With the parent-teacher conferences, a wholesome partnership in the business of education emerges and if well-laid plans are followed openmindedly, the child stands to reap benefits that promote his educational growth.

I. SUMMARY

One of the most important aspects or needs in education, past, present, or future, is the involvement of parents. Time and again numerous articles, by people in the field of education, have been written that attest to the need for parental participation in a school system. Each year more schools incorporate the parent-teacher conference into their regular program.

Parent-teacher conferences have specific purposes and that is to report to the parent about their child in school. First, parents want to know how their child is progressing, how their child is getting along, what their child is a part of and how their child measures up.

The second specific purpose would be the assurance the parents want and need that their child has the very best in the way of educational opportunity, a classroom teacher, modern materials, and other things necessary in modern education. This assurance should be given in both word and actuality.

The third specific purpose of every parent-teacher conference is to gather tactfully significant data about the home environment and past history of the child.

II. CONCLUSION

Ways of improving the parent conference are through in-service training sessions for everyone involved. Scheduling and re-scheduling can be taken care of on a local level to suit each situation. Checklists for the preparation of teachers and parents for the conference should be made. Getting the parent to see how valuable his role is for the success of the parent-teacher conference program is very important.

The elementary school principal has a major role in helping teachers to make parent-teacher conferences successful. The principal and the classroom teacher have to make a cooperative effort if parent-teacher conferences are to accomplish anything. In fact, the principal has an inescapable responsibility to provide realistic leadership that will

equip his teachers to get the job done. Through in-service meetings the principal can help his teachers understand the why, what, and how of good parent-teacher conferences.

Schools today are relying more and more on conferences to supplement report cards and other written forms of communication between parents and teachers. Teachers realize that they cannot do the best possible job of educating each child without the help of the child's parents. The parent can supply information about the child that could be very useful to the teacher. And the teacher can offer suggestions to parents on how they can help with the education process at home. The best way to discuss such matters is an informal face-to-face meeting. It gives both the parent and the child's teacher an opportunity for full exploration of his progress, his behavior, and the reasons behind his successes and failures. This two-fold interest and concern for the child, exhibited by the parents and teacher give the student a new lease on life. What better way is there to help a child? This tool is geared to do just that.

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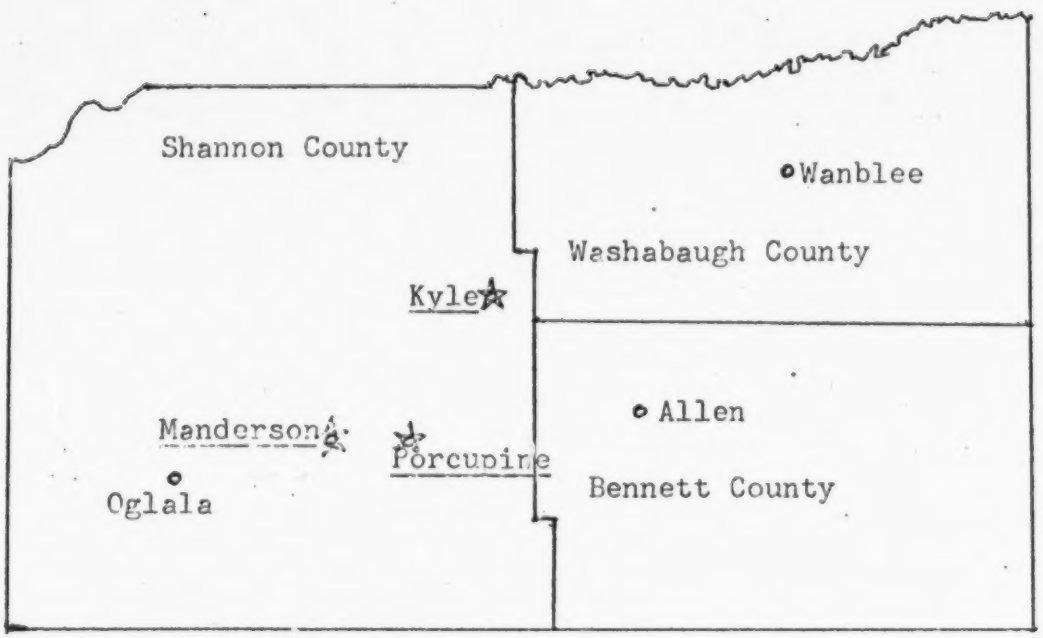
APPENDIX A

PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION



☆ Starred locations indicate the Selected Schools.

Distances between schools on the Pine Ridge Reservation. These are Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools (K-8). Using Porcupine as the point of reference;

Porcupine to Manderson . . . . . 25 miles
Porcupine to Kyle . . . . . 25 "
Porcupine to Wanblee . . . . . 65 "
Porcupine to Allen . . . . . 50 "
Porcupine to Oglala . . . . . 48 "

APPENDIX B

Porcupine School
Porcupine, South Dakota

Dear Mr. and Mrs. White Thunder,

I know you must be anxious to know what Jimmy will be studying in school this year and how you can help him to do his best. It is an important year for him and with your help, I'm sure it will be a profitable year, too.

I'm inviting all the parents of my pupils to a group conference on Tuesday, September , at 7:30 p.m. to discuss the school year ahead. We will meet in Room 8 (Jimmy's classroom). I hope you will be able to come. Will you let me know in the space below whether or not we may expect you? Either mail it to me or send it with Jimmy tomorrow.

Cordially yours,

Third-grade teacher

_____ I will be able to attend

_____ I will not be able to attend